Australian Bureau of Statistics

2914.0.55.002 - 2006 Census of Population and Housing: Media Releases and Fact Sheets, 2006

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 27/06/2007 First Issue

MEDIA FACT SHEET

June 27, 2007   Embargoed 9.30 am (AEST)   70/2007

Australians overall claim more than 250 ancestries, speak 400 languages at home: Census

Ancestries

- In the 2006 Census, Australians reported more than 250 different ancestries, with many people claiming two ancestries. The most common ancestry was Australian, with 7.4 million, or 37% of all people, choosing this as at least one of their ancestries. The next most popular ancestries were English (6.3 million or 32%), Irish (1.8 million or 9.1%) and Scottish (1.5 million or 7.6%), reflecting the dominant sources of migrants to Australia since European settlement. Italian, German and Chinese were the next most common ancestries.

- Around 64% of Australian residents identified with only one ancestry, while 28% selected two ancestries.

- Of the people who selected two ancestries, the most common combinations were English-Australian (with around 1.26 million persons), English-Irish (753,000) and English-Scottish (504,000).

Languages

- The 2006 Census also recorded that almost 400 different languages were spoken in homes across Australia. Close to 79% of Australia's population spoke only English at home, a decrease from 82% in 1996.

- As in 1996, the three most common languages other than English in 2006 were Italian (accounting for 1.6% of the population), Greek (1.3%) and Cantonese (1.2%). Of these, Cantonese was the only language which had an increase in the number of speakers since 1996 (21% growth), while Italian and Greek speakers declined in number by around 16% and 7% respectively.

- The recent growth of Asian languages and the decline of those from Europe in Australia reflects the recent trends in the birthplaces of Australia's overseas-born. Of Australia's main non-English languages*, Mandarin and Hindi have experienced the fastest proportional growth – both more than doubling in speakers since 1996. Conversely, German speakers declined the most in number, falling by around 24%.

- Between 1996 and 2006, except for Darwin, the proportion of each capital city's non-English speakers increased. In 2006, Sydney had the largest proportion of its residents speaking non-English languages at home (around 29% or 1.2 million people), while Hobart had the smallest proportion (5.1% or 10,000 people).

*Languages with more than 50,000 speakers (who speak it when at home).

NB: The figures in this fact sheet exclude overseas visitors. Where an answer to a question has not been provided (i.e. not stated) these occurrences form a separate category in the data and therefore some percentages do not total to 100%.

Source: ABS 2006 Census.

Table 1. 2006 Census: Top 15 ancestries, Australia

	Persons '000	Proportion of total population(a) %
Australian	7 371.8	37.1
English	6 283.6	31.6
Irish	1 803.7	9.1
Scottish	1 501.2	7.6
Italian	852.4	4.3
German	811.5	4.1
Chinese	669.9	3.4
Greek	365.2	1.8
Dutch	310.1	1.6
Indian	234.7	1.2
Lebanese	181.8	0.9
Vietnamese	173.7	0.9
Polish	163.8	0.8
New Zealander	160.7	0.8
Filipino	160.4	0.8

(a) As respondents can identify with up to two ancestries, proportions for all ancestries do not add up to 100 per cent.

Table 2.1. 2006 Census: Top ten ancestry combinations, Australia

Rank	Ancestry combination	Persons ('000)
1	English-Australian	1 263.1
2	English-Irish	753.4
3	English-Scottish	503.9
4	Australian-Scottish	278.7
5	Australian-Irish	257.3
6	English-German	241.1
7	Scottish-Irish	213.1
8	Australian-German	118.8
9	Australian-Italian	116.0
10	English-Italian	95.3

Table 2.2. 2006 Census: Top ancestry combinations, Australia

Top ancestry combinations (excluding British, Irish and Australian ancestries)	Persons ('000)
Italian-German	15.2
Italian-Greek	10.5
German-Polish	9.9

Table 3. 2006 Census: Top 10 languages spoken at home, Australia

Language	Persons '000	Proportion of total population %
English	15 581.3	78.5

Italian	316.9	1.6
Greek	252.2	1.3
Cantonese	244.6	1.2
Arabic	243.7	1.2
Mandarin	220.6	1.1
Vietnamese	194.9	1.0
Spanish	98.0	0.5
German	75.6	0.4
Hindi	70.0	0.4

Table 4. Top 15 languages spoken at home, Australia - 1996 Census - 2006 Census

Language	1996 '000	2006 '000	Growth (1996-2006) %
English	14 564.9	15 581.3	7.0
Italian	375.8	316.9	-15.7
Greek	269.8	252.2	-6.5
Cantonese	202.5	244.6	20.8
Arabic	177.6	243.7	37.2
Mandarin	92.4	220.6	138.9
Vietnamese	146.3	194.9	33.2
Spanish	91.3	98.0	7.4
German	98.8	75.6	-23.5
Hindi	34.0	70.0	106.0
Macedonian	71.3	67.8	-4.9
Croatian	69.2	63.6	-8.0
Korean	29.9	54.6	82.6
Turkish	46.2	53.9	16.6
Polish	62.8	53.4	-14.9

Table 5. Language other than English spoken at home, capital cities - 1996 Census - 2006 Census(a)

	1996 %	2006 %	Change in persons (1996-2006) '000
Sydney	26.4	29.3	223.1
Melbourne	25.7	26.3	133.7
Brisbane	9.2	10.7	53.9
Adelaide	14.9	15.2	11.8
Perth	13.5	13.9	33.0
Hobart	4.9	5.1	0.9
Darwin	15.7	12.5	0.9
Canberra	13.7	14.6	6.3

(a) Capital City Statistical Division.

This page last updated 27 June 2007